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ABSTRACT

All teacher certification programs at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) meet state standards for teacher education programs. Most admission and retention requirements are similar to those of other teacher preparation programs, though one unique component helps scrutinize teacher education students in the retention program: students must demonstrate characteristics that are essential for effective teaching. A performance assessment team monitors the ongoing student performance assessments conducted by faculty. Retention in the teacher education program is contingent on satisfactory appraisals. The performance assessment team develops policies and procedures to provide ongoing monitoring and information about each student. The process is ongoing, includes input from all education faculty members, helps students recognize and work through problem areas, and identifies students not suited to teaching. Division of Education faculty receive performance criteria and procedures at the beginning of each semester so they can monitor students (via a checklist and input regarding student progress). The performance assessment team enters faculty data into a database to track and analyze each student's performance. If students have neutral ratings, they receive a letter regarding leadership qualities and effective teacher characteristics. Students with noted concerns receive a letter identifying the areas of concern and recommending that they address the issues. A second letter results in a conference with the assessment team. This program at WTAMU is relatively new but has been successful in improving the retention program. (SM)

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Performance Assessment Team: A Retention Program Revisited

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2

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Introduction

The National Council on Educational Standards and Testing (1992) recently addressed the issue of standards in a document entitled Raising Standards for American Education. To create quality schools with high standards for students equally high standards must be set for those who teach. We will not improve the quality of teaching until teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills and attitudes needed to develop and carry out basic curriculum improvement.

The need for teachers who have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be effective has many implications for teacher preparation programs. A primary consideration for improving teacher preparation programs is the implementation of admission and retention standards. For teacher preparation programs to produce effective teachers, they must carefully screen teacher education applicants and carefully monitor students' performance during their preparation program.

The state of Texas established standards for teacher education programs. All certification programs at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) meet these requirements. Teacher Education students must meet State, University, college and department requirements for acceptance into the Teacher Education Program. Admission requirements are similar to most other teacher programs across the nation. Requirements for admission to teacher education at WTAMU include:

1. An approved degree/certification plan and Application for Admission to Teacher Education.
2. A minimum overall GPA (includes all courses taken at all colleges) of 2.5 with a grade of "C" or better in each course in each teaching field and in professional education. We require a minimum GPA of 2.5 in each teaching field/concentration and in professional education courses.
3. The completion of 12 semester hours of course work at WTAMU (six semester hours minimum for post-bac students).
4. An overall GPA of 2.5 at WTAMU.
5. The completion of English 101 and 102 with a grade of "C" or better in each course (or CLEP credit).
6. Pass all sections of the TASP test.
7. A grade of "C" or better in SCOM 101.
8. Completion of EDPD 340 with a grade of "B" or better.
Students completing the course with a grade of "C" will not be admitted until completion of EPSY 341 with a grade of "B" or better. (Students must obtain 2.5 GPA in first six hours of foundation courses.)
9. Approval of the Teacher Certification Office based on the recommendations from the faculty of students' teaching field(s) or areas of specialization and check of judicial records.

Admission to and retention in the Teacher Education Program is required before enrollment in methods courses or student teaching. Applicants receive written notification from the Teacher Certification Office regarding acceptance.

While most of the admission and retention requirements are similar to other teacher preparation programs across the nation, one component developed by faculty members at WTAMU shows promise of providing scrutiny of teacher education students in our retention program.

Students must demonstrate characteristics shown to be essential for effective teaching. Continuous performance assessments by faculty will be monitored by a Performance Assessment Team. Retention in the Teacher Education Program will be contingent on satisfactory appraisals.

Under some circumstances, a student may be withdrawn from the Teacher Education Program. We provide due process to insure that we treat all students fairly.

Performance Assessment Team

Historically, one screening mechanism used by many teacher preparation programs has been interviews. Typically, interviews were used to decide if applicants to the teacher preparation programs had the qualities it takes to become an effective teacher. At WTAMU the interview process consisted of interviewing three to five students by a panel of faculty members from the Division of Education. We scheduled the interviews to last approximately 30 minutes. We tried to include others on the interview panels. When available, school principals and teachers, faculty members from other academic departments and retired teachers were included.

While we designed the interviews to identify students who had the attributes needed for teaching, the interviews were time consuming and were not effective in screening students from the program who lacked the characteristics needed to be a successful teacher. The faculty therefore concluded that a new way must be found to screen applicants to the teacher education program.

The faculty concluded that they could judge the attributes of students more effectively after they had them in class. The program maintained the admission and criteria but interviews were replaced by a retention process that focuses upon students' characteristics related to their future success as a teacher. This process appears to be more effective than interviews because the faculty screens students as they interact with them in classes. The faculty can appraise the quality of students' soft skills. These skills are difficult to judge, but as the faculty work with students they can assess, for example, students' communication and human relations skills.

We created a three-member assessment team to develop policies and procedures that would provide an ongoing monitoring system that would provide information each semester about every student enrolled in the teacher education program. The team initiated its work by analyzing the admission and retention criteria from other universities. After reviewing the admission and retention instruments used at other universities, the team developed a process that was based upon the following considerations:

1. The process must be ongoing to monitor adequately and provide assistance to students.
2. The process must include input from all education faculty members.
3. The process must be positive and designed to help students to recognize problem areas and to work through those problem areas.
4. The process must identify students not suited for teaching and counsel them into other fields.

The team concluded that they must structure the process to insure that we require a minimum amount of time for most the faculty and that adequate data be available to support the denial of formal admittance to students.

The Process used by the Performance Assessment Team

The WTAMU Performance Assessment Team distributes the performance criteria and procedures to the Division of Education faculty during the first week of each semester. They remind each instructor to issue the documents and to discuss the retention process. During the final weeks of each semester, they issue instructors a packet that contains a class roll. After each student's name is listed, the instructor can mark one of three columns; pass, concern or neutral. Instructions provided to instructors suggest that they should mark a pass by those students' names whom they believe to be good candidates for teaching. They are directed to mark concern if they have reservations about the student's fitness for teaching. Instructors mark the neutral column if they feel unable to recommend a student because of a lack of knowledge of the student's ability.

No additional information is needed from the instructor or those students who are marked pass. For those students who are of concern, the instructor completes a short and concise form and returns it to the Performance Assessment Team. The form allows the faculty member to mark concerns related to (1) responsibility, (2) problem-solving ability, (3) professional behavior, and (4) social and emotional well-being. We require the faculty member to discuss the marked concern with the student when he turns marks this category.

Faculty members can also mark urgent concern for those students that need immediate attention. We schedule students whom we flag with an urgent concern mark to meet with the Performance Assessment Team immediately and do not have warning letters issued. Typically, urgent concerns have been associated with academic dishonesty.

Data Analysis

As the faculty returns the packets to the Performance Assessment Team, Performance Assessment Team enters the data into a database. In this way they can track and analyze students' performance each semester. They can carry action plans out when they identify patterns of problems for each of our students.

Programs for Neutral Patterns

The team can easily identify patterns of concerns or neutrals. When they identify two neutrals for a student, they send a letter a letter that suggests that the student attempt to show leadership qualities and effective teacher characteristics. We require students who continue to be rated neutral to schedule a conference with the Performance Assessment Team.

Meeting with students who have a pattern of neutrals focus upon suggestions for improvement for the student. Typically, they inform students of the need to participate in class and to schedule meetings with their instructors. The team attempts to determine the cause of the performance problem and to provide support for the student. Often the cause is a communication problem or the lack of self confidence.

Programs for Concern Patterns

Students with concerns marked by a faculty member receive a letter from the Performance Assessment Team. The letter that identifies the criteria on the performance appraisal form that was of concern and recommends that the student address the problem. When a student receives a second letter resultant from a second concern, they require a conference with the Performance Assessment Team.

The purpose of meeting with the Performance Assessment Team is to provide help and support to the students. However, the Performance Assessment Team can block enrollment of the student until the student takes appropriate action to remediate the problem. Administrators can dismiss students from the program if they fail to make progress.

Results of the Performance Assessment Team

The program is relatively new, but shows promise of improving the retention program at WTAMU. The team has met with many of our students and has had the opportunity to address concerns openly and honestly. We believe that this has improved one component of our admission and retention process that addresses soft skills and that this is important.

We have withdrawn one student from the program based upon the Performance Assessment Team recommendations. The faculty believes, however, that by issuing the criteria to students in our classes and by tying these criteria to a formal assessment program, we are focusing our students' attention on important facets of their pre professional development.

Some of the faculty members have expressed concerns that Performance Assessment Team process will lower their student evaluation. Additionally, some of the faculty have avoided marking the concern or neutral columns to avoid the discomfort of addressing the concerns with their students.



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